

CLAIMS

1. An x-ray generator comprising an electron gun, electron focusing means, a target and electronic control means, wherein [the] an area of the target on which the focusing means causes electrons from said electron gun to impinge comprises an x-ray source emitting an x-ray beam, the control means being adapted to control the electron focusing means so that the x-ray source on said target may be varied in size, wherein the x-ray generator further comprises a shutter to control the emitted x-ray beam, and wherein the control means includes a switching means to switch the electron focusing means between a first unfocused state in which the x-ray source has a first area upon action of the shutter and a second focused state in which the x-ray source has a second area smaller than said first area when the shutter is open.

2. [An] The x-ray generator according to Claim 1, wherein said first area has a surface area at least twice that of said second area.

3. [An] The x-ray generator according to Claim 1, wherein said first area has a surface area at least four times that of said second area.

4. [An] The x-ray generator according to Claim 1, wherein said first area has a surface area at least ten times that of said second area.

5. An x-ray generator comprising an electron gun, electron focusing means, a target and electronic control means, wherein the area of the target on which the focusing means causes electrons from said electron gun to impinge comprises an x-ray source generating an x-ray beam output, the control means being adapted to control the electron focusing means so that the x-ray source on said target may be varied in size, wherein the control means includes a switching means to switch the electron focusing means between a plurality of focused states, whereby in each state the x-ray source is in a corresponding discrete stationary position on said target.

6. [An] The x-ray generator according to [any preceding] Claim 5,
wherein the electron gun comprises an evacuated tube, and wherein the electron
focusing means comprises an x-y deflection system for [centring] centering the
5 electron beam in the tube.

7. [An] The x-ray generator according to [any preceding] Claim 6,
wherein the electron beam focusing means further comprises at least one electron lens.

10 8. [An] The x-ray generator according to Claim 7, wherein said electronic
lens comprises an axially symmetric or round lens for focusing the electron beam to a
line focus and for steering the electron beam.

15 9. [An] The x-ray generator according to Claim 7, wherein said electron
lens comprises at least one [quadrupole] quadripole or multipole lens for focusing the
electron beam to a line focus and for steering the electron beam.

20 10. [An] The x-ray generator according to [any preceding] Claim 5,
wherein the target is a metal selected from the group Cu, Ag, Mo, Rh, Al, Ti, Cr, Co,
Fe, W, Au.

11. A method for extending the life of a target of an x-ray generator,
wherein the generator comprises an electron gun, electron focusing means and a
target, the method comprising the steps of:

25 firing electrons at the target such that the area of the target on which the
focusing means causes electrons from said electron gun to impinge comprises an x-ray
source emitting an x-ray beam,

controlling the emitted x-ray beam by action of a shutter in its path, and
controlling the electron focusing means by the action of the shutter to move

30 between a first unfocused state in which the x-ray source has a first area and a second
focused state in which the x-ray source has a second area smaller than said first area,

the intensity of electron impingement in the first state being sufficiently low to reduce target degradation, the intensity of electron impingement in the second state being sufficiently high such that the source produces a predetermined required level of brightness and source size on the target.

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12. [A] The method according to Claim 11, wherein the electron beam current is substantially the same in the first and second states, while the intensity of the beam per unit area at the target is lower in the first state than in the second state.

10 13. A method of extending the life of a target of an x-ray generator, wherein the generator comprises an electron gun, electron focusing means and a target, the method comprising the steps of:

15 firing electrons at the target such that the area of the target on which the focusing means causes electrons from said electron gun to impinge comprises an x-ray source, and

20 controlling the electron focusing means to move between a plurality of focused states, whereby in each state the x-ray source is in a corresponding discrete stationary position on said target, such that the intensity per unit area in each discrete position is substantially constant, and such that there is no overlap on the target between the discrete positions corresponding to each focused state.